

How Homophobia Hides

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Homophobia, it is probably safe to say that the word conjures similar images of violence and aggression aimed towards gay and lesbian members of society. If a news report mentions a homophobic crime, without paying too much attention, it is possible to construct a picture of, if not all, some of the details and at the very least the motivations behind such inexcusable hatred. Obviously we are supposed to rest easier with the criminality of such activity and should be strengthened by the wise eye of the law aiming to prosecute the offenders. However, for all of the media attention given to eradicating wider society's prejudices how safe do we feel? How tough is it still to be gay in a small town, or a tough town, how dangerous is it to walk the streets at night after quitting a gay bar, getting on a bus, a train? More interesting, what of the subtle homophobia of parents, friends, the press, media, the "liberal", the "modern", the "disinterested"? Fundamentally homophobia is the prejudice towards another person based upon their sexual orientation, meaning that you are singled out as different and by that nature, dangerous. However, this does not make homophobia a simple label for a simple crime. As with any form of phobia, there are vast individual differences and variations, ranging from one end of the scale to the other. Racism, Ageism, Sexism all have their own complications and diversities in much the same way homophobia does. People are different and what is worse is that people are always comparing themselves to others. However, just because you may not physically attack someone in the street, does not mean you are any more tolerant of them as a member of society. Obviously, in a court of law, criminal charges are brought against criminal activity and whereas deliberately expressing a hateful opinion to another person based upon their sexual orientation is a crime; what of the daily, more fleeting incidents we are all likely to face? Let me give you an example if only to highlight my train of thought. Recently whilst walking in a self professed liberal part of London with a friend, both neither more outwardly gay than any other people walking along the streets of the town and certainly not releasing that gay aura we all seem to possess, I was suddenly aware of a car slowing as it drove alongside us. Making sure he had eye contact, the driver took his hands from the wheel, (a criminal offence in its own right) to make the effeminate gesture of the limp wrist we have all, apparently, been blessed with. His point made and I am sure fearful for his life as he approached oncoming traffic, the car gained speed and headed along its way. "walking with a friend in the broad daylight of mid afternoon is complicated by homophobic intolerance." Other than being utterly baffled at how this driver was ever so perceptive at recognising our sexual orientation, I found myself angered that even walking with a friend in the broad daylight of mid afternoon is complicated by homophobic intolerance. Moreover, this is exactly the homophobia that is so hard to prosecute. I could have attempted to remember his number plate, or retaliated by, what, kicking his car? To what avail though, would this be? I use the example as it illustrates the underlying homophobia that is near impossible to tackle. Obviously straight men spend time together, walk in pairs down busy high streets and of course such a miscalculation of their friendship would easily be brushed off. However, when you are attacked whilst in public for such a small part of who you are as a person, it is easy to be angered. "when you are attacked whilst in public for such a small part of who you are as a person, it is easy to be angered" I am gradually heartened that the police, at least in the UK, are making great efforts to tackle the many forms of homophobic crime, I have no doubt the law is being enforced for those crimes that are reported. However, what of the homophobia we must face in schools, or when watching television? How many times are objects described as gay, to mean rubbish? Or how many times do parents turn off a film which may have a gay kiss? My mother, in her eternal wisdom and grace could not be more supportive, my father also offers nothing but encouragement in everything I embark upon. Only the other day my mother admitted that having a gay son has encouraged her to really consider the importance of such a thing as sexuality; she believes that as a parent, love is never an option but a commitment. However, parental relationships are complex and I often contemplate how, as my life changes and matters of family and children are considered, my relationship with family and friends will change. If then parental love is unequivocally contractual, why do so many gay sons and daughters get expelled from their family, their home; are we not all a son and daughter to a mother and father? There are too many complications to even begin an answer, yet somewhere at the root is the homophobia engrained within society itself. Despite the Classical concept of the love of two men to be the purest of all, for hundreds of year, sodomy, and therefore homosexuality has been illegal, immoral and totally unforgiveable in the eyes of the law. Like the slaves of Africa, who were sold for so little yet doomed from the start, gay men and women shall always struggle to reclaim the heritage of homophobia. "are we not all a son and daughter to a mother and father?" As for the motivations behind such intolerance and ignorance? Who can fully understand the mind of another, yet perhaps there is something in the irrational notion that to be gay is to be weak. We are all from time to time seeking to have power over another, to be seen as more successful, stronger even than at least one other person. Thus, to be seen as gay, is to be identified as weak in the eyes of the accuser. Remember though, the message of Pride is one that must resonate as it tells us that to be gay is not to be weak; rather, it is to admit to difference, not the difference of sexual attraction but the difference of humanity. We are all, fundamentally born out of difference, given life to fulfil a potential and whereas some squander this opportunity by attacking others, you have the power to embrace your whole self and prove the homophobic accuser is always weakened through their accusation